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ABSTRACT

A willingness by the teacher to experiment with innovative instructional strategies and aids is a prerequisite to success for students in a reading situation in which the reading material is not properly matched to the student's reading competence. Using recordings done by professionals is one such technique. Another device is the tape recorder, used to record group responses, role playing activities, panel discussions, or individual reports. Another effective instructional strategy involves the selection of five students in the class who are assigned a different story to read at home and to present in a five-minute oral summary to the class on the following day. To promote increased interest and understanding of biographical material, the teacher can ask students to play the role of a person being interviewed on a talk show. An optional instructional strategy for using biographical material is the use of the television format in "To Tell the Truth." Using the panel format, three students can be given the same biography to study carefully and attempt to play the part of its subject. The teacher, acting as the master of ceremonies, can then draw out the participants so that they reveal the facts found in the biography. Through such experiences, students can find reading a joy instead of a pain. (HOD)

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"To Be or Not to Be"--A Good Reader?
(Ways to Help Poor Readers Understand Literature)

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Abstract

The article suggests instructional strategies and aids for accommodating difficult literary material to a reader's reading ability level. Instructional techniques include a story-telling strategy and a Johnny Carson Show format for helping students understand biographies.

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"To Be or Not To Be"---A Good Reader?
(Ways to Help Poor Readers Understand Literature)

Since a vast number of students are not skilled enough in reading to handle much of the material that they are assigned, it becomes the task of the teacher to offer any aids or instructional strategies which might lead students to read with greater understanding and enjoyment.

The primary aim of every teacher of literature is to lead the students into an aesthetic experience, to make possible their "willing suspension of disbelief" in order that they may vicariously experience the emotion which permeates the story, poem, or drama to which they are exposed. Always this is the first objective. Because of the difficulty of some literary selections, and the inability on the part of weak readers to perceive meaning, oftentimes this aesthetic experience cannot take place. However, when a skilled reader's vocal intonations give necessary cues for understanding, the listener may comprehend. Generally, the spoken language is more readily understood than the written, especially if the written words are filled with added meaning for the reader as he hears them spoken when he reads them. If the teacher can select those works where the meaning is most likely to be obscure, and will read aloud while the students follow in their textbooks, success is almost assured. The teacher should elucidate from time to time that might otherwise be a meaningless passage. The students may not be able to understand material given them as an at-home assignment because all of the shades of meaning may not be clear to them; however, if they can listen to the same material read by a skilled reader, the students may enjoy a moving, aesthetic

experience. Bright students whose eyes and minds yearn to race ahead will already have developed powers of concentration which will allow them to do so for their own enjoyment and with no disturbance to others. Only after the work has been experienced as a work of art should any attempt be made by the teacher to meet the secondary goals of developing vocabulary and improving skills of writing and speaking. After the teacher has presented the literary selection in the best known way to lead the students to experience it as a work of art, there are a number of different kinds of activities of value which could be introduced. Interaction among students in discussion or group activities, role playing, pantomiming, or any other related activities can prove rewarding if wedded to purposeful goals. Assignments handled by groups or by as few as two students working together can foster personality growth and leadership development. A few activities are suggested below for use in dealing more effectively with materials found in the literature books being used.

Using recordings done by professionals is one means of enhancing learning and promoting literary appreciation. Another device which offers many possibilities is the tape recorder, used to record group responses, role playing activities, panel discussions, or individual reports. Such recording of students' speech responses can serve a dual purpose; one purpose might be that of making permanent a discussion or speech which could be used for review by students who were absent or for those who need additional reinforcement. One gain from this procedure is more a psychological one than otherwise. Because a person is eager to hear himself perform well in any situation, he will usually make more diligent preparation when

he knows that his words will be reheard. The knowledge that his voice is being taped seems to elicit improved performance from a student, once he becomes accustomed to the procedure. The same psychological inner pressure seems apparent when groups or individuals present reports that are reinforced by written presentations on a transparency viewed on a screen by the class. The need to feel a sense of adequacy among one's peers prompts one's best effort. If the members of the class become acclimated to working in groups, presenting their findings in writing on a transparency shown on a screen, having their oral presentations taped for future reference, a built-in mechanism seems to operate which can move individuals toward greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others as well as toward greater literary understanding.

Another instructional strategy might prove effective. From a class of approximately 30 students, select five articulate leaders who are able to relate well to others. Confer with this group of five, assigning to each a different story to read at home and to present in a 5-minute oral summary to the class on the following day. Since this first exposure to something new will color the reaction of the class, it is important that the initial experience be as positive as possible. No reading assignment will be made to the other class members.

Next day, the 25 other class members will be divided into groups of five students each and will separate into various parts of the room. The "storytellers" for the day will take their posts--one in each of the groups--and will proceed to tell their stories, using only the 5-minute time period allotted to them. An inexpensive timer can be used to force students to work within a specified time frame. When the timer bell sounds, the group

will have 5 more minutes to ask any questions and to discuss the story among themselves. A small group such as this allows everyone an opportunity to speak without the fear of appearing ridiculous, a fear that sometimes hinders a shy student from speaking out in class. When the timer bell sounds the second time, the storytellers move to another group and proceed to tell their stories again. This procedure is repeated until all groups have heard all of the stories. It will be possible for the teacher to observe each storyteller perform once, and this student can be evaluated on his oral performance and may be exempt from the written evaluation which will take place later. During the written evaluation, the storytellers may be allowed to use the time for reading the stories silently, or they may meet together in a group to share with each other the stories assigned to each one. The value of this plan is threefold.

1. The preview of the story should aid the weaker student who might have had difficulty reading the material independently. With a knowledge of "what happens next," even the poorest reader whould be able to read the story with profit.

2. Because the storytellers are to perform as leaders before their peers, they will prepare more deligently. Seated in a circle "teaching" a small group will help to develop leadership talents in a situation that is less tension-filled than a similar situation with a larger group. Because the storytellers must teach their story five different times, they will be given the opportunity to perfect their performance.

3. The group interaction resulting from student-helping-student may be the greatest gain from this instructional strategy.

The stories previewed in class could be assigned to the entire class

and a quiz on the material scheduled. At the time of the quiz, the students might be asked to name the "Storyteller of the Week." Winning the approval of the class might serve as an incentive to the student to do an outstanding job.

In order to promote increased interest and understanding of the biographical material in the literature textbooks, the students might be asked to play the role of a person being interviewed on a talk show. They must assume the role of a person in the following position or profession: Queen, Prince, President, Writer, Flier, Space Traveler, Scientist, Philosopher, Sculptor, Mountain Climber, or Admiral.

The student should choose a biography to read as background for his role-playing assignment. The teacher will act as the interviewer and must be well acquainted with each selection in order to lead the interviewee to reveal as much about himself as possible. Again, students must work within a time limit so that no one student monopolizes to the exclusion and ennui of others. Taping this interview would be appropriate and useful. The teacher's comments are presented below.

> Do you know why Johnny Carson has had such a successful show on TV for so many years? One of the reasons is that he has interesting people from all walks of life who share with the TV audience something of themselves. We are going to stage our own show of interesting people, and I will be sitting in for Johnny. On the handout you have been given are listed titles and positions which might appeal to you. Perhaps you would like to look quickly in the textbook at the article that interests you. As I call your name, tell me the personality you prefer to read about and pretend to be in order that I may record your choice. In this way, everyone will have a different biography to read and a different role to play. Acquaint yourselves with the background information so that you can answer accurately any questions asked and can relate some incidents which your double experienced.

I am going to ask each student to submit five questions with answers on the material he reads. As complete an answer as possible should accompany each question. These questions and answers on all the biographies will be made available to you on a mimeographed sheet so that you may review the material to be included on the unit test. Your homework assignment will consist of reading from the textbook the selections which are discussed in class during the day. The class discussion should help you to read the material in the textbook more easily.

An optional instructional strategy for using biographical material could use the format of the television show, To Tell the Truth, a show in which three persons (who are versed in knowledge possessed by the real personality whose identity is unknown to the audience) try to fool the panel into believing that each one is the real personality. On the television show, after the panel selects the one they believe to be the real person, the real person "tells the truth" and reveals his identity. Today, in similar fashion, three students will be given the same biography to study carefully. They must thoroughly acquaint themselves with all the aspects of the biographee's life so that they can respond accurately to questions and make comments which sound convincing. They will be attempting to play the part of the biographee. The teacher, acting as the master of ceremonies, will draw out the participants so that they reveal, as much as possible, the facts found in the biography. The audience will be asked to vote by applause on the person they think most convincing in his role-playing of the character studied.

The biographies portrayed in class will become the reading assignment for homework on the night they are discussed. In-class time should be allowed for the panel of persons working together on a common biographical selection to discuss the incidents each will relate and have opportunity to

give or receive help in comprehending any difficult passages.

A willingness by the teacher to experiment with novel, innovative approaches--which may sometimes fail--is prerequisite to success for students in a reading situation in which the reading material is not properly matched to the student's reading competence. Such a teacher might make reading a joy instead of a pain.

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